

Pitt Rivers Museum Members Magazine

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PRM
members



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Cover image: The 'Honouring Our Future: Yukon First Nations Graduation Regalia' exhibit at Canada House, London. Photo: © Mike Thomas/Yukon Arts Centre. Page 9

buzz and activity. For those wanting a quiet reflection I would recommend catching the first two opening hours, perhaps enjoying an early cup of coffee first thing on the lawn waiting for the summer doors to open. If you do come at a busy time and need some reflection, I suggest the Clore balcony on the first floor as ideal to take a seat and enjoy one of the best views in the Museum.

I tend myself to have two approaches when I visit a museum. I either just go because I like the feel of the place or I haven't been there before – or I go for something specific: I want to see an exhibition or, maybe, I want to know more about a particular object, how it was made and its uses. If I'm feeling particularly creative I'll take my pencils with me and do some sketching. If you do this at Pitt Rivers (one of the best places as the Ruskin students have found) do ask for one of the sketching stools to sit on and if you haven't planned this and would like to anyways, I'm pleased to say you can also now pick up some very decent sketch pads in the shop. Whatever you do this summer enjoy your cultural spaces, take time out, and enjoy the best of museums.

Karrine Sanders, PRM Senior Administrator

Summer Visiting

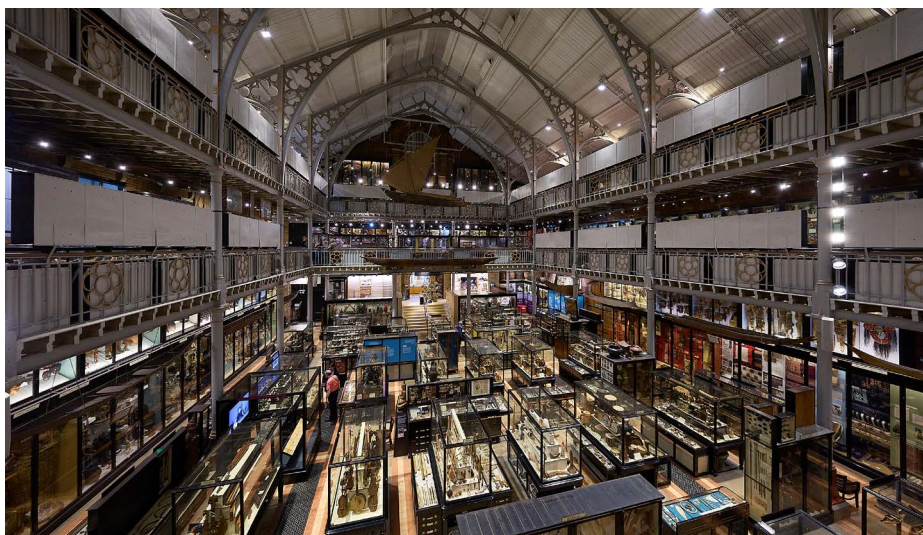


Photo: © PRM

Welcome to the summer edition of the Magazine! Summer tends to be the time when many of us set aside time to visit our well-loved galleries, parks, gardens and museums, or venture further afield to a place not yet found, uncovering many a gem to add to our cultural world. Sometimes this can be a full day city trip, busy with visitors from far and wide or, perhaps, to a lesser known small museum that encourages you to take in the moment. Thankfully the Pitt Rivers has both. Come at the weekend or afternoons and enjoy the

Editorial



Photo © Dawn Osborne

Thank you to all the Members who answered the Membership survey recently. I was delighted to see the Magazine got almost universal praise and was cited as an important reason why many people value maintaining their Membership. We always welcome feedback and Members are invited at any time to e mail me with any ideas for the Magazine.

Also recorded in the survey as very important to people were events at the Museum and two of the articles in this issue cover recent popular ones. Firstly page 7 covers 'The Gathering Place: Africa' and the talented performers from Africa at that event taking place as part of the larger 'Making The Museum' project at the Museum, designed to highlight the creatives behind the creation of

the objects in the Museum. Secondly, I was delighted to attend and make my own piece of Yukon beading at the recent sold out workshop taking place as part of a series of endeavours by the Museum in concert with the exhibition at Canada House in London of hand crafted graduation regalia by indigenous people, see Page 9 and our cover photo. Many of us partake in a lot of remote access events since the Pandemic, but it's lovely to actually visit the Museum and have a direct experience with the senses. If you missed out on the Yukon Beading workshop, perhaps you fancy the upcoming lacemaking workshop instead, see back page for details.

Once again we have a great set of articles for you this issue. Thanks to all writers, staff and volunteers that contributed to the making of this issue. It's great to know from the Membership Survey that all their hard work is so appreciated.

Dawn Osborne, Editor

From the Museum



While the Oxford summer may not yet be at its peak, summer visitors and families have arrived and are being welcomed by our wonderful visitor-experience team. This year, they can all enjoy the fascinating Hawaii exhibition and many other events. Look out for research pop-ups and coffee mornings and of course the 'Behind the scenes' for members looking at conserving and caring for the feathered cloaks from

Hawaii and Aotearoa (the Maori name for New Zealand).

There is, of course, a lot else going on so check the website for up-to-date information and, if you haven't yet caught it, look out for Kieran Brooks' 'Inspired trail' on occasional Sundays. These examine how Philip Pullman and local crime fiction authors Colin Dexter and Cara Hunter were inspired by the Museum and its artefacts to

make them an integral part of 'His Dark Materials', 'Inspector Morse' and 'Star Wars'.

Within the Museum we are saying goodbye to some long serving and valued colleagues including Andy McLellan and Catherine (Cat) Booth as well as Dan Homewood who has been supporting our facilities. We will miss them and wish them all the very best in their new endeavours.

Thank you to all our members who took part in the recent members' survey. There was a large response that included some insightful and informative feedback which we will take forward. They included a request for coffee mornings (now in place with the regular research pop ups) and to have more regular updates and 'what's on' news so we are looking at developing a short newsletter that will supplement the magazine. Watch this space!

Whatever you are doing this summer do enjoy it and do pop by and say hello!

Karrine Sanders, PRM Senior Administrator

From the Director



Over the last eighteen months, we have said goodbye to three amazing members of the Pitt Rivers Museum's senior management team who helped shape the Museum and make it the great place it is today. John Simmons, Head of Operations, and Julia Nicholson, (Joint) Head of Collections, both worked at the Museum for more than 30 years and Andrew McLellan for over 20 years. It is hard to see great people

leave, but it was wonderful to celebrate their achievements with many of our staff (and cake!). They leave a legacy of care and innovation, with their accomplishments being much appreciated by us all.



Fig 1 Andy McLellan

Andy (Fig. 1) continued and built on the work of Helene la Rue, setting up the brilliant learning team that now serves over 20,000 children each year. He also set up the handling collection, which forms the basis of over 2000 teaching objects that our wonderful volunteers work with every weekend. Julia's 'Made for Trade', 'Recycling' and 'Intrepid Women' exhibitions live on in the permanent galleries.

Julia (Fig. 2) has spent the last two years writing a book about the latter, which we'll launch in March next year for International Women's Day.

John's work in shaping the Museum's galleries as Head



Fig 2 Julia Nicholson with Sir David Attenborough

Technician and then as Head of Operations and Facilities cannot be understated and lives on in the permanent galleries of the Museum. Cases that he particularly loved (e.g. the one with shields - also one of my favourites) are on the second floor. During the Covid-closure months, John would come into the Museum to check on the objects, facilities and building. One legacy is a beautiful podcast called 'The Caretakers', where John talks about his unending love for the Museum. This started with a school visit to a rather dark place that he found hard to love, but still, after thirty years, continues to surprise him (<https://metalculture.com/metal-tv/caretakers-pitt-rivers-john/>).



Fig 3. John Simmons

Laura Van Broekhoven, Director

Objects Related to Slavery

The Pitt Rivers Museum was founded in 1884, at a time when Britain's long involvement with Transatlantic slavery was already considered a thing of the past. British slave ships had transported almost 3 million captives from West Africa to colonies in the West Indies and North America, but that trade had been abolished in 1807, and enslaved people living in the British colonies had been emancipated in 1834. The long shadows of Transatlantic slavery extend over many British museum collections, even those with founding collections post-dating slavery itself. In October 2023 I spent three months in Oxford as the grateful recipient of a Visiting Research Fellowship at Magdalen College, hunting for their presence in the PRM collection. I undertook a detailed review of the

catalogue, making use of digital heritage resources that are providing new ways to identify and study the surviving material culture of Transatlantic slavery. These include the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database at www.slavevoyages.org, which brings together archival information on 36,078 slaving voyages undertaken between 1514 and 1866, and www.LiberatedAfricans.org, which collates archival information on Africans liberated from Spanish and Portuguese slave ships after 1807.

I discovered that the shadows of the Transatlantic slave



Ivory handled ceremonial sword inscribed 'OLD CALABAR, W. AFRICA, Coll. by Capt. Irving'. PRM 1884.24.12.

trade can indeed be detected in the PRM collection and present three examples from my findings here. One of the most important is an ivory-handled ceremonial sword from Old Calabar (Nigeria) collected by slave ship Captain James Irving, who made seven slave-trading voyages to Nigeria in the 1780s. He probably acquired this weapon from one of his African trading partners.

After Britain abolished its slave trade in 1807, the Royal Navy's West Africa Squadron sought to inhibit slave trading by other nations. The Museum curates some very moving nineteenth-century photographs of Africans liberated by the Navy, and also of sailors from Sierra Leone and Liberia employed on anti-slavery ships. In 1821 HMS Myrmidon captured the Portuguese ship 'Esperança Feliz', carrying captives from Nigeria. Among them was a teenage boy



Obeah charm figure. PRM 1985.49.108.

named Ajayi, who was placed under the care of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Sierra Leone. Ajayi adopted the name Samuel Crowther and eventually entered the ministry. He was consecrated as Bishop of the Niger in 1864: the first Anglican bishop of West Africa. Crowther is depicted in old age with his wife Asano—herself 'liberated' from a slave ship in 1822—and their son Dandeson, in one of the many photographs in an album thought to be the work of G.F.Packer, a CMS architect, and dating to the 1880s.

The PRM has never actively collected artefacts from the African diaspora, but nevertheless curates several objects employed in the belief systems of enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Caribbean. Amongst these is an object used in Obeah, an African-based

religion practiced in Jamaica. It was donated to the Museum in 1914 by a Dr R.S. Turton: almost certainly the district medical officer of that name who worked for the Jamaica Medical Service from 1894-1914. It comprises two carved, wooden, anthropomorphic figures, connected at the legs by an iron chain, from which two padlocks and a tiny key are suspended. The smaller of the two figures is double-faced and is likely intended to represent an Obeah practitioner, a spiritual healer and diviner considered to have the gift of second sight, and thus to be a 'four-eyed' or 'two-headed' person. This is a rare and important object: one that reminds us that Transatlantic slavery will never be 'history'. Its legacies are with us today in so many ways, and not least in the belief systems that were brought to the Caribbean by enslaved Africans and are still practiced today.

Dr Jane Webster, Visiting Research Fellow at Magdalen College.



Photograph with hand-written annotation: 'BISHOP CROWTHER. VENLE. ARCHN & MRS CROWTHER'. Probably taken by G.A. Packer, c. 1888. PRM 1998.66.1.

Hidden Histories - Makaramo figures

Hidden Histories is an oral history project in the coastal areas of Tanga, Tanzania. Developed over 11 years, the aim was to co-create a project with the villagers. They mostly do not have legal tenancies, and are from the 'Zigua', 'Bondei', 'Shambaa', 'Digo' and 'Mbugu' peoples. We documented the lives of fishermen and women who work on their own small farms.

The Museum had a collection of 550 'makaramo' figures that originated from the area, about 15 miles from where we based. The makaramo figures were photographed in the UK and the images then used to spark conversations in Tanga. It was hard finding people who knew anything about them: eventually three sisters and a daughter (who was a trained and reputable 'mganga' - or healer) gave us the most information.

The figures were taken without consent or agreement by the British colonial official Ralph E.S. Tanner. However contemporary local opinions are that they are cursed - and he was welcome to them! Most colonialists were obsessed with the ideas of 'traditional' beliefs and African ways of living, from a very European point of view, (although colonialists often distorted, repressed or rubbished them, even whilst claiming to 'preserve' them).

Colonial 'subjects' were forced to assimilate, although in the coastal regions including Tanga and an adjacent area Pangani there were over 140 rebellions. Colonists feared how spiritual leaders - who were often extremely well known and popular - organized and motivated people to rebel against, ignore or undermine colonial rules.

What is Mganga and Uchawi?

There's a big difference between 'mganga' (healer, or 'waganga' - plural, healers) and 'uchawi' (sorcery) in Tanzania, although they often tend to be muddled when they are discussed in the Global North. This is down to the propaganda spread during colonial rule: Tanzania was occupied by German colonists from 1885 until 1919 when it became a British mandate until independence in 1961.

Mganga are seen as kind, using their power and training for positive ends to heal and cure. Uchawi is seen as sorcery and does not require training. It is used for harm and destruction, sometimes even killing people. Margareth Esther John and her aunts believe makaramo are cursed, and are objects used by witches to cause harm.

In contemporary Tanzania there is often a hesitancy to publicly admit to being a healer: 'mganga' or 'waganga'. The enormous body of knowledge, and the cheapness of the medical advice still makes it very popular, and many young people see it as a fast, and lucrative way to earn a living.

The Future: Should these objects be in an English Museum?

Today many communities around the world are questioning whether their objects should be in UK museums. The Pitt Rivers Museum welcomes discussions with communities around the future of the collections it holds. The interviewers asked people what they thought about the makaramo figures being in a UK museum and whether they should stay here, and received a range of views. We're thinking about the future by looking at the past.

Dr Thembi Mutch, Research Fellow SOAS, University of



Display of Makaramo figurines in the Pitt River Museum - ground floor.

London and Global Associate University of Sussex. Principal Investigator, Hidden Histories - Historia zilyofichwa za ardhi na bahari.

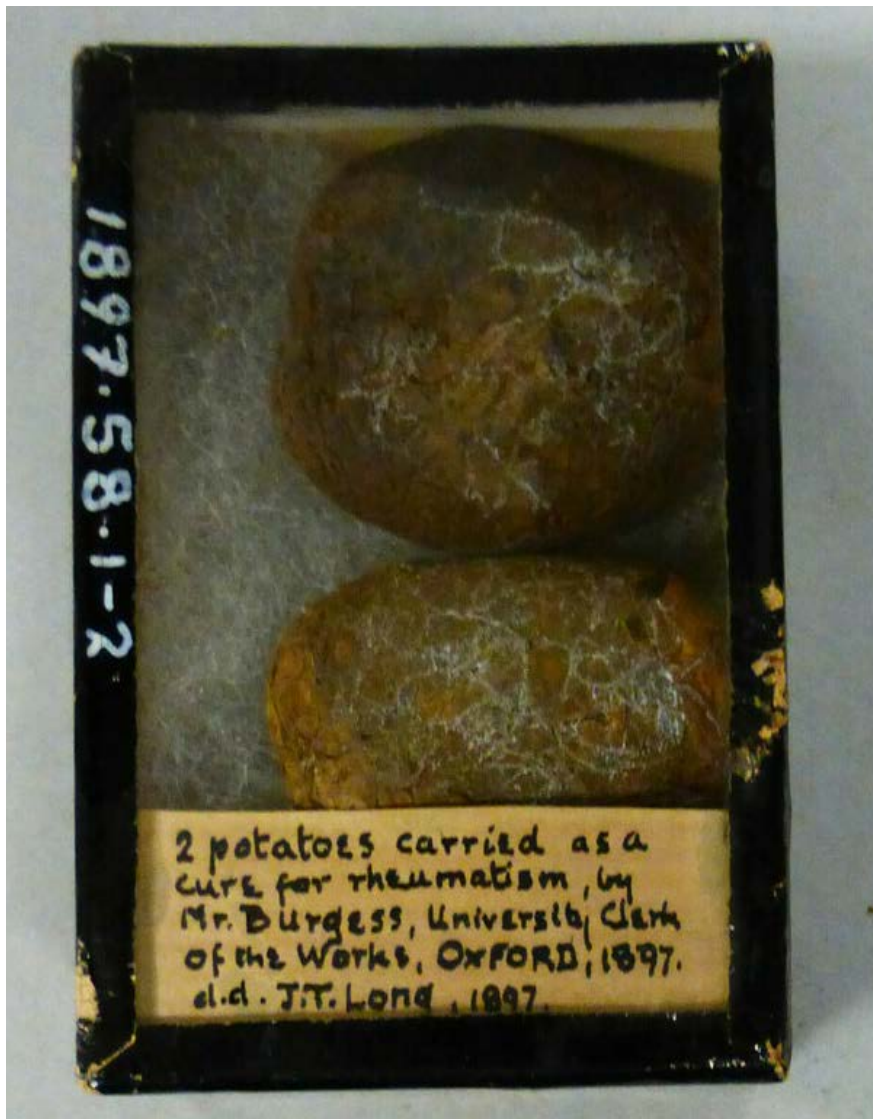
"These figures should remain hidden. They should not be left in the open for people to see. If you are found with them, the people will automatically know that you are a witch doctor dealing with evil spirits. All your clients will certainly flee from you. They are clay figurines shaped however you want to form them. Then you send them with a specific purpose to the recipient, the enemy. It enters their body, then they see an image before their eyes, they feel scared all the time and they stagger, and will be screaming... You can make different things out of clay, these makaramo figures are all for cursing, you will hear someone saying this is a chicken, but it's not".

Margareth Esther John (trained mganga or healer)

"These clay figures have great importance to the people of Tanga and Tanzania in general. When we look at them, that's when we start a conversation. That's how culture grows, as both sides, the Tanzanian and the visitor communicate and explain. I think this desire to learn, and to grow, helps both English and Tanzanian culture to grow."

Mwinyi Kombo

Potato Amulet



Two potatoes carried as a cure for rheumatism

In 1897, one Mr Burgess, the Clerk of Works at Oxford University, donated two shrivelled potatoes to the Pitt Rivers Museum. He usually kept them in his pockets. They were the ultimate “jacket” potatoes.

The Pitt Rivers is dedicated to categorising and displaying a “democracy of objects” not according to time or nation, but according to human usage. Since the potato is fairly ubiquitous in human culture, it means there are many in the Museum’s collection.

In addition to Burgess donation, 11 other wrinkled specimens are catalogued in the Museum’s collections, and are neatly labelled. The names of the previous owners are usually not identified because most of the potatoes were stolen before they were donated. They were medical charms thought to be cures for rheumatism – and if they were stolen, they were thought to be even more effective.

In the Victorian era, and for centuries before, a variety of vegetables were carried whole, or pulverised and put into bags to hang around the neck in the hopes of warding off or curing illness.

Before modern pharmaceuticals, most ‘*materia medica*’ (substances used in medical practice, or drugs) were herbal. Their usage was described in books by the ancient

Greek physician Pedanius Dioscorides (40-70 AD) and in Pliny’s ‘*Natural History*’ (1st century AD), an encyclopaedia written in ancient Rome. These books from the ancient world continued to be reference guides throughout the Renaissance.

In his book Pliny described the usefulness of plants such as the mandrake root, which was thought to resemble a human figure complete with what was known as “the virile members”. The root was made into amulets to be worn to promote fertility and in love magic. Using it in this way, is also referred to in the ‘*Song of Solomon*’ in the Bible.

Paracelsus, a 16th-century Swiss doctor, elaborated upon such theories, claiming each plant had a sign of its medical application resembling the part of the body or ailment that it could cure.

For instance, lentils and rapeseed were thought sympathetically to cure smallpox because the seeds were similar to the pox pustules.

Plant therapy was also linked to the use of astrology in early medicine. The planets were thought to control the fluids or humours in the body (black bile, blood, yellow bile, and phlegm), all of which had to be kept in careful balance to promote health. An imbalance was believed to be cured by bleeding or by the ingestion of an herbal remedy, or in some cases, wearing of the appropriate plant amulet.

Diseases caused by a particular planet could be healed by a herb of the opposing planet. For example, lunar diseases like the common cold or fluid filled tumours were considered to produce an abundance of cold and moist humours, as the Moon controlled the waters in the tides. These lunar diseases could be cured by means of sunflower or solar herbs or tinctures, which were hot and drying as sunbeams. Lettuce which was watery was to be avoided.

But what of our potato and its connection to rheumatism?

There is a poison, called solanine, present in green potatoes and potato eyes (the root-like sprouts). Solanine is chemically closely related to atropine in deadly nightshade. In fact, the potato is called a nightshade vegetable.

Atropine creme in the Victorian era, sometimes in combination with morphine, was applied to “relieve the pain of rheumatism, sciatica and neuralgia”.

As to why the potatoes had to be stolen to cure rheumatism, we still don’t quite know, but it certainly adds to their charm.

Anna Marie Roos, *Professor of the History of Science and Medicine in the School of History and Heritage, University of Lincoln*

Making the Museum

Who made all the stuff in the PRM?

The simple answer is that the PRM, like all other ethnography museums, knows very little about the individuals who made its collection: of its many hundreds of thousands of objects, the records name only 12,200 makers. The PRM has now decided that more should be known about them and has been awarded a 3-year grant entitled *'Making the Museum'* from the Arts and Humanities Research Council to do this.

I found out about this grant when I went to a wonderful evening at the PRM in May entitled *'The Gathering Place: Africa'*. A group of African writers, poets and singers enthralled a large group of guests as they moved around the PRM using items in the cases as the basis for words and music (Fig. 1, 2 and 3). The highlight for me was the wonderful singing of Kayefi, a cloaked Nigerian woman whose superb voice and gentle movement provided the background to many of the words.

The purpose of the evening was partly to highlight the *'Making the Museum'* project and partly a start event for the grant. Its principal investigator is Chris Morton, the deputy director. Chris has an Oxford MSc and DPhil in anthropology and specialises in photography. Late in June, I met up with Chris in his office at the PRM to ask about his plans for the next three years.

Why did you apply for the grant?

The nature of anthropology museums is changing. Whereas they used to be framed around the work of explorers and collectors, we are now realising that a museum needs to be understood as a "community" of things and images with lasting connections to the indigenous communities who made them. We now have to involve these communities with the items that we hold on their behalf.

What will you be doing over the next three years?



Fig. 1. Oxford hip-hop artist Rawz performing music composed in response to the sound archive on the Lower Gallery.



Fig. 2. Lydia Idakula, Maka, Ndukwe Onuoha, Donna Ogunnaike and Kayefi.



Fig. 3. Donna Ogunnaike, poet, and Kayefi, singer, performing in the court area.

We will be analysing our archives to see what this historical material tells us about their indigenous makers and how the objects were collected and photographs taken. We will therefore be working with indigenous communities to learn from them and to reacquaint them with what we have of their history. To do this, we will involve them through fellowships, workshops and conferences.

The resulting insights will be published in academic journals and monographs but will also be made publicly available through short films on a public website. Equally important will be the relationships forged with maker communities and we have long-term plans to maintain these. I also

expect that the way that we show the PRM to our visitors will also change.

Given the breadth of the PRM collection, on what areas will you focus?

One theme will be the music archive and the photo collection and the other will look at three core techniques: carving, weaving and forming. These not only underly the making of most of our objects, but are still employed by many indigenous communities.

What future public events are you planning?

Given that the fellowships will have a strong creative element, there will be events to highlight their work. We may also follow up the Africa evening with events involving performers from other areas represented in the PRM collection, such as the Pacific Islands and south-east Asia.

I was left feeling that this new grant represents another step in making the PRM a beacon for the future of anthropology museums. I ended my discussion with Chris by asking him for another interview when the grant had ended so that he can tell me about its achievements. Something to look forward to.

Jonathan Bard, Member

Hawaiian Exhibition



Poster for Hawaiian Exhibition at the PRM in the Special Exhibition room.

the stories and knowledge that the group wanted to share with our audiences.” The unintentional narrative that arose from the 15 created quilts was that of the ‘ahupua’a’, a traditional form of land division and stewardship, highlighting the intricate connection between Hawaiian cultural practices, knowledge, language and place, thus becoming the theme of the PRM’s newest exhibition ‘Ma uka to Ma kai: Quilting the Hawaiian Landscape’.

The ahupua’a is a land division usually extending from ‘ma uka’ (mountain) to ‘ma kai’ (the sea) encompassing all a community needs to be self-sufficient and remain careful stewards of the land. During research trips to Hawai’i, I was often given the directions ma uka and ma kai, instead of right or left. I quickly learnt that ma uka and ma kai are not just directional references; they embody the Hawaiian understanding of care and access to natural and cultural resources within the ahupua’a. Traditionally, Hawaiians recognized the connectedness between the land and sea and preserved the integrity of the balanced ecosystem in conjunction with intensive land and water use. The past 150 years has seen a disruption of indigenous practices accompanied by a marked decline of Hawaiian ecosystems. Today, about 90 percent of the food and supplies needed to sustain the island’s population is imported.

On the night of the 7 August of 2023, in the midst of gale force winds I landed in Honolulu, to conduct the interviews with the farmers, activists and practitioners whose work would inform the exhibition. Next day, I awoke to the news of the devastating Lahaina fires, on neighbouring Maui. The fire, rapidly spread by strong winds, was symptomatic of something much deeper, the disruption of the ahupua’a. A key theme to interviews I conducted in the wake of the fire was ‘wai’ or water. It is not a coincidence that Hawaiian word for wealth is ‘waiwai’ or water water. Water is at the

In 2020, I began working with the Honolulu-based Poakalani Hawaiian Quilting group as part of a contemporary collecting project at the Pitt Rivers Museum. The aim of the project was to work collaboratively with artists, makers, and practitioners to challenge the narratives often presented in museums about their specific cultures and/or localities. The only brief was that “the quilts should reflect

centre of the ahupua’a system, however my interviews with farmers at Ka’ala Farms and He’eia Fishpond were all about a lack of water. The islands of Hawai’i are not short on rainfall, quite the opposite, but in the late 19th century, tunnels were dug to redirect millions of gallons of water from natural streams to foreign owned plantations. This diversion of water completely changed the landscape of many ahupua’a, leaving once fertile lands, dry and desolate and prone to fires, such as that of Lahaina.

Thus, the exhibition naturally became more focused on stories of water and the ahupua’a. The quilts traverse the ahupua’a, starting from the ‘Ohia Lehua’ trees which are essential to islands’ mountain watershed and under threat due to a fungus called Rapid Ohia Death. We move the ‘kula’ (plains) where streams historically fed into taro ‘Kalo’



‘Ohia Lehua quilt by Susie Sugi, designed by John Serrao. Photographed by Tim Hand Productions.

terraces which not only fed communities, but also filtered the water of sediments before heading into the ocean. It is here amongst the taro patches that we hear from Eric Enos of Ka’ala Farm about the communities fight to reclaim stolen water and replenish their taro terraces, to feed themselves. We then move to the sea, where the team at Paepae o He’eia discuss revitalising an 800-year old fishpond and their fear that, even after restoration, there may

not be enough fresh water from the He’eia stream to create the brackish environment needed to breed fish. The exhibition is about the art of Hawaiian quilting, but is inextricably linked to these practitioners whose work embraces a 21st century sustainable stewardship and looks back towards a future of abundance.

Marenka Thompson-Odlum, *Research Curator- Critical Perspectives, PRM*



OThea Correia (granddaughter of the founders of Poakalani Quilters) in exhibition space. Photographed by Tim Hand Productions.

Yukon Beading - Yukon graduation regalia travels to London

The 'Honouring Our Future: Yukon First Nations Graduation Regalia' exhibit shown across the Yukon already, runs until September 21, 2024 at Canada House, London. The opening of the exhibition was the culmination of a week-long delegation to England that included cultural presentations, meetings with Yukon First Nations leaders, and beading workshops led by Vuntut Gwich'in elder, Shirlee Frost held at the Pitt Rivers Museum, where there was also a private viewing of 19th century First Nations textiles.

Curator of 'Honouring Our Future'

Lisa Dewhurst was delighted to see participants from the beading workshop arrive wearing the beaded pins they'd made with Frost "People were so engrossed in the process and super excited to learn ... they realized the magnitude of work it takes to bead even one flower, even just one petal," says Dewhurst.

Dewhurst, who is of the Nlaka'pamux Nation of Merritt, B.C., lives in Teslin. There, she has been adopted into the Kukhittan Clan of the Teslin Tlingit (Raven Children) and has been given the Tlingit name of Keis.ey, which refers to the time just before the dawn breaks.

Dewhurst, along with Frost, two Yukon First Nations youth, and Mary Bradshaw (director of visual arts at the Yukon Arts Centre) viewed pieces at the Pitt Rivers and advised Museum staff on handling them. Staff also shared that the Museum has a repatriation process, and that staff would be happy to support Yukon First Nations leaders in beginning it if they wished to bring some artifacts back to the North. "Staff there were just excellent," said Dewhurst. "So kind and forthright."

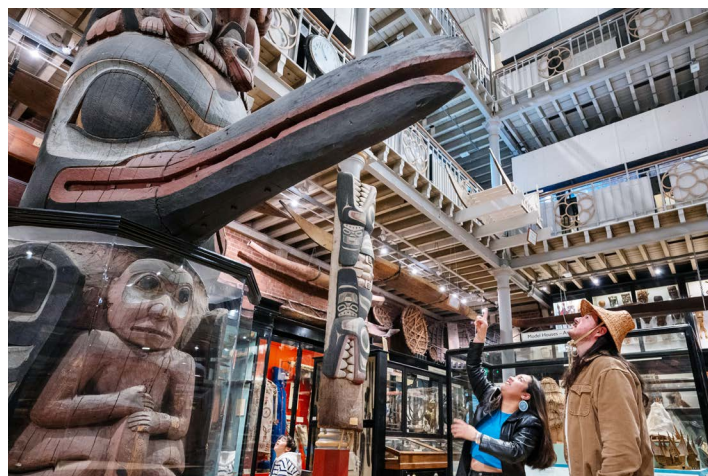
When the delegation arrived at the Museum, Dewhurst says staff apologized for how colonial some of the exhibits would be (it's something they're working to address). "We hugely appreciated the opportunity to have open and frank discussions about the displays, cultural care, and community access, as well as the guidance offered during the creative workshop," said Bryony Smerdon, assistant



Curator Lisa Dewhurst helps lead a beading workshop at Pitt Rivers Museum.



Vuntut Gwichin elder Shirlee Frost, Yukon Arts Centre's Mary Bradshaw, exhibit curator Lisa Dewhurst of and Dr. Tanveer Ahmed of University Arts London inspect a Gwichin tunic from the 1860s at Pitt Rivers Museum



Kluane First Nation Lenita Alatini and Kwanlin Dün First Nation Kailen Gingell visit the Pitt Rivers Museum

curator for Pitt Rivers Museum. "I like to think that we are making steps in the right direction as an institution, but appreciate that the Museum can still be a very uncomfortable and confronting place." she added "We still have much decolonisation work to do."

Dewhurst said she noticed that individual pieces at the Pitt Rivers were displayed in glass cases and grouped by category (masks here, hats there, etc.) rather than by geography, nation, or country. Labelling typically included materials and a description of the item. Sometimes there were dates.

But one display stood out to her for bucking that trend. "As I was going through the museum, I noticed a small pair of boys pants and they were probably made for about a four-year-old," says Dewhurst. "And the label really caught my eye because it said 'beautifully decorated pieces of clothing were often made for children as an act of love by their parents or family' ... to me, that was beautiful, attaching some humanity." To Dewhurst, that small but significant addition was what allowed the exhibit to do what any exhibit should do—tell a story rather than coldly labelling an artifact as simply an item. "It warmed my heart in this middle of this very colonial atmosphere that I had been immersed in within the Museum," says Dewhurst. At the time, she wove the story into her opening remarks and told Pitt Rivers staff that the pants had shown a window into their process.

Dewhurst said it was a nice symmetry with 'Honouring Our Future', which includes a written backstory on each of the 16 pieces in the show, along with video interviews of nine of the graduates and scenes from the 2024 graduation ceremony.

Visitors to the exhibition in London have asked meaningful questions about how certain beadwork represented certain areas, and how families decide what to include on regalia. Dewhurst commented "It's a great exhibition to illustrate the care, attention, love and support that exists in communities for their youth".

Amy Kenny, Yukon Arts Centre

Handmaking



Real time mobile eye-hand tracking provide useful insights for understanding the temporality and multimodality of the potter's attention.

How can we explain the transformation of clay into the form of an object? What kind of knowledge, embodied relations, memories or anticipations does this simple transformation entail? Paradoxically, we don't seem to know enough about that the process of making by hand. We know a great deal about hands. We also know a great deal about forms. Yet we seem to have only a vague understanding of the creative process that lies in between.

One of the principal aims of the 'HANDMADE - Understanding Creative Gesture in Pottery Making' project (funded by the European Research Council), has been to investigate the creative dialogue between maker and material. Since 2018, together with a team of archaeologists, anthropologists, artists, and psychologists, we have been undertaking participant observation with more than thirty potters and ceramists in mainland Greece and the islands. We have been recording and comparing skills, materials and techniques, following the ways of the hand. Our basic hypothesis is that pottery making is not just a skilled practice; instead, it is a form of thinking with and through clay. The agency of the hand within that process remains highly ambiguous. One of the major objectives of the HANDMADE project has been to disambiguate that central issue. One way we have been trying to do this, is by reconstructing the temporal stratigraphy of the experience of making. That is, by carefully observing the different stages of the creative process and the types of agency experienced during those stages.

Anatomically the boundaries of the hand are well defined, but during the handmaking process those boundaries dissolve, raising important methodological challenges. One thing we have learned first-hand, by trying to identify and compare the processes by which the creative potential of clay becomes realised through the potter's hand (i.e., creative gestures), is that the purity of action and causality is lost. Trying to separate cause from effect inside the loop of pottery making

is like trying to construct a pot keeping your hands clean from the mud.

Handmaking is at the heart of human becoming: we make things with our hands that in turn make us what we are. The anthropological significance of that process cannot be overstated. It applies to the modern digital designer as much as it applies to the Palaeolithic tool maker. Perhaps, understanding the meaning of handmaking has never been as relevant and timely as it is today, given its ongoing transformation within our modern creative industries driven by AI and digital forms of fabrication. There are important considerations here about the role of making in our

everyday living, education and mental health.

A marked feature of all crafts, not just ceramics, is that they enact time and imagination in ways that still resist appropriation by our consumptive capitalist value system. There are lessons that the cognitive ecology of craft can teach us about the nature of the creative process and the ethics of care, which can help set us free from the enslaving logic of modern, product oriented, meaning of innovation. We need to study those lessons in meaning making that things and materials (forms and flows) can offer. Crafts, like pottery making, offer a good place to start.

For more information about the HANDMADE project itself, visit: <https://handmade.web.ox.ac.uk/home>

Lambros Malafouris, *Professor of Cognitive & Anthropological Archaeology, University of Oxford.*



Capturing creative gestures

The Harmonium



A traditional handheld harmonium

The harmonium is closely associated with Hinduism in Europe, just as the organ is closely associated with Christian churches worldwide. The Hare Krishna movement, which gained prominence in Europe during the late 1960s alongside the hippie movement, further solidified this association. Beatles guitarist George Harrison featured the harmonium in several of his solo compositions, especially during his exploration of Indian classical music and mysticism. Yet this instrument faced significant controversy in India. The Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore, composer of the Indian national anthem, referred to the harmonium as “the curse of Indian music,” emphasising its lack of compatibility with the classical music of the subcontinent.

When the British established themselves as rulers in 18th-century India, they brought spinets and organs—big, heavy, yet delicate keyboard organs made of wood. These instruments did not adapt to the warm and humid Indian climate: the high humidity would either cause them to succumb to the arduous journey or, if still intact upon arrival, destroyed them within a short period of time.

This changed in 1842, when the Frenchman Alexandre Debai patented a harmonium that proved robust and portable, making it a favourite among missionaries. It was still large and nowhere near portable, but the wood and the keys were better at withstanding the rough transportation and the change in climate.

The instrument gained popularity among numerous missionaries, and in 1875, an instrument maker in Kolkata created a version without a base, acknowledging the traditional practice of performing North Indian classical music while sitting on the ground. Since Indian melodies didn’t rely on complex harmonies like European music, musicians could play with one hand while pumping the bellows with the other. This was the birth of the handheld harmonium we know today, and by 1913, India had become the leading market for handheld harmoniums. The instrument revolutionised Indian music and became

popular in all parts of society because it was quite affordable and easy to carry around. Within a short period of time, these handheld wonders accompanied religious services, Hindu ceremonies, musical dramas, and classical Indian singing as well as being the main entertainment in thousands of homes at all types of family gatherings. However, there were critics who considered the harmonium a threat.

Critics in both India and Britain viewed

the handheld instrument with scepticism largely due to the instrument’s Western origins, seeing it as a symbol of Western influence during the Indian independence movement.

Another significant criticism was about the harmonium’s inability to handle microtones, or ‘*shruti*’, which are integral to Indian classical music. This limitation posed a threat to the preservation and propagation of traditional Indian music, resulting in further disapproval of the instrument. From 1940 to 1971, All-India Radio banned the handheld harmonium’s tones. Even today, acceptance on the national airwaves is provisional. Prominent figures like Nehru, Gandhi, Tagore, and Coomaraswamy expressed their disdain for the instrument.

The attempt to banish the sound of the harmonium was also part of a larger effort to define a national sound for India, distinct from the West. Meanwhile, the harmonium’s continued use in education served a somewhat different national project: to standardise Indian music practice. Despite criticisms, the harmonium remains a widely used instrument in India today and its affordability, portability, and durability have contributed to its enduring popularity.

Western contemporary artists like Tori Amos and the British folk singer-songwriter Olivia Chaney have also embraced the instrument and often incorporate the harmonium in their music for that hauntingly beautiful and unique sound.

Lena Heide-Brennard, *Writer and Composer. Lecturer at Østfold University College, Norway.*



A demonstration of the handheld harmonium by Lena Heide-Brennard. Just hold your phone camera to the QR code to link up and see the instrument in action.

INFORMATION SHEET

The Members' Magazine is published three times a year

INFORMATION

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Admission FREE.

For details of all current & forthcoming
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Refreshments. The Horsebox Coffee
Company on the lawn is open from 9.00 -
17.00 daily, serving hot and cold drinks and
homemade cakes. With delicious locally
roasted coffee, scrumptious brownies,
flapjacks and cookies, the Horsebox Café is
the perfect place for a coffee break!

All museum events:

www.prm.ox.ac.uk/events

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Annual Subscription: £36 (Joint:
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three times a year, Members' lecture
series.

MUSEUM DIARY DATES

We look forward to welcoming you to
the galleries, exhibitions and events.

Exhibitions and case displays

Special Exhibition room

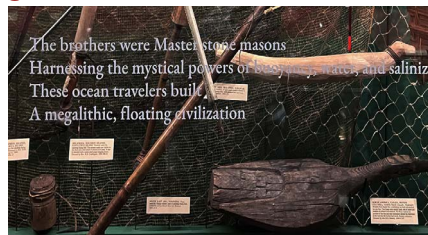
**'HAWAI'I Ma uka i Ma kai': Quilting the
Hawaiian Landscape'**



Ohī'a Lehua quilt. Quilted by Susie Sugi. Designed by John Serrao. PRM 2022.57.1

Through a combination of contemporary
and historic 'mea no'ea'u' (skillfully created
works) this special exhibition explores the
past, present, and future of the 'ahupua'a'
(land divisions) system. Hawaiian quilts
by the Honolulu-based Poakalani Quilters
are curated in narrative that follows the
ahupua'a and the people working with
the landscape, from mountain forests to
the coastal waters, as well as introducing
the Hawaiian royal history of the palatial
grounds of their group meeting place.

Fishing Display on top floor of museum galleries



'Unfinished' - a poem by Carol Ann Carl on display at the Pitt Rivers Museum.

'Unfinished' - a poem by Carol Ann Carl
Unfinished is a poem written by Carol Ann
Carl, a daughter of the island of Pohnpei in
the Federated States of Micronesia. With
a background in Biochemistry and health,
her community work revolves around
Micronesian youth and women. Carol
Ann was entrusted to be the keeper of
traditional origin stories, which she shares
through her writings. Storytelling and
writing are personal forms of pedagogical
healing.

MEMBERS' DIARY DATES

2024

Saturday 5 September

19.00 to 20.30

'Faovale Imperium'

A free, but booking required, gallery
performance with poetry and music
placing Pacific voices in the heart of the
Museum alongside objects from our
collection. Join New Zealand Samoan/
Welsh comedian James Nokise and DJ
Don Luchito for a funny and thought-
provoking exploration of the Museum's
Pacific collections.

Saturday 14 September

13.00 to 16.00

Lace making workshop

The Pitt Rivers
Museum has a
large collection
of lace and
lacemaking
equipment in
the collections,
much of it
from the local
area. View



Bedfordshire lace motif example

selected samples

on special display in the Conservation
Laboratory and then learn the skills in
this one-day workshop to make your
own. Price: £90/Members: £72 (Includes
lunch and refreshments)

Last few weeks

Make sure you catch the last few weeks
of the thought-provoking 'Nothing
Without Us: Experiences of Disability' co-
curated trail and the popular 'His Dark
Materials' trail before they both come off
display in October!

Look Out! for emails about forthcoming

Coffee Morning Talks with visiting
researchers and artists. These talks are
open to staff and Members and are an
opportunity to meet up with coffee and
refreshments and hear more about what
is going on in the Museum, both behind
the scenes and in the galleries! Our first
meet up was led by Roba
AlSalibi's discussing her
research on the Thesiger
photograph collection
from the Middle East.



*Sheikh Zayed with Falcon by
Wilfred Thesiger*